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Housekeepers' Chats

Wednesday, January 28, 1931

Not for Publication

Subject: "Healthful Sleep for the Youngest". Information from the Children's Bureau and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Why Sleep?"

Uncle Abner and Uncle Ebenezer had one of their long discussions last evening. When Uncle Abner comes to town, as he usually does about once a month, I prepare to hear debates on any or every subject in the universe. Last night he had scarcely taken off his coat and established himself by the fire, when he began.

"It does beat all, the way these scientists are poking their noses into everything nowadays and find out all kinds of strange facts about common everyday things. There's food, for example. In the old days, people just took food as a matter of course. If it tasted good and there was enough to fill them up, that's all they asked. But today, with these nutrition experts finding out things, we all have to think about vitamins, minerals, calories and no telling what next."

"A good thing, too," said Uncle Ebenezer. "People won't be complaining about dyspepsia and losing teeth and getting too fat when they use more of this new knowledge to help them choose their food".

"Maybe so, maybe so, Ebenezer. I know I'm getting just as fussy as the rest of them. When I was a boy, I wouldn't have kicked about pork and beans three times a day, but now I have to have my green vegetables and my pint of milk and all the rest."

Uncle Ebenezer nodded and Uncle Abner continued, "And food isn't the only ordinary, everyday affair that the scientists have been investigating. There's sleep, too. You can't imagine the things they're finding out about sleep. Until recently nobody would have thought of making a study of sleep. Sensible people never gave it much serious consideration. It was just one of nature's plans. Parents put their children to bed at night, maybe six in a bed, and expected them to get all the sleep they needed without any fuss. My grandmother used to say that healthy people were kept awake by only one thing--a guilty conscience."

"Yes," agreed Uncle Ebenezer. "Even the poets had the same idea as your grandmother. It seems to me that Shakespeare said something about 'innocent sleep, sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,' and then somebody else wrote, 'Sweet are the slumbers of the virtuous man.'"

"You always were good at remembering poetry, Ebenezer. Well, it's not the poets today who are doing all the writing about sleep-- it's the psychologists and the child training experts. Before they get through they are going to show us that sleeplessness may be due to a lot of things beside a bad conscience."

Uncle Abner was right. Several groups of psychologists at different universities have been studying sleep and have discovered many helpful and interesting facts about it. Much that they have learned has to do with children, so here's the time for up and coming parents to prick up their ears and take in the helpful information available.

Did it ever occur to you that sleep helps children to grow? That is one thing I've learned lately. A child grows most when he is asleep. When he is awake the food that he has eaten is used to supply him with energy for his play and other activities. When he is asleep his activities are cut down and his food can be used to renew the tissues that have been worn out by the day's play and to build new tissues. If the child gets too little sleep, his growth is hindered.

Sleep in the right amount and of the right kind is necessary to the good health of every growing child. In fact, the three essentials for health are: enough sound sleep, right food, and outdoor play in the sun. These three essentials depend on each other. If a child gets plenty of simple food and vigorous outdoor play in the sun, he is likely to sleep well. If his diet is improper and he sits around indoors all day, he may sleep poorly. If his sleep is disturbed or too short, he may be tired and unable to make the best use of his food, and, as a result, may be undersized or underweight, even though he is not underfed.

It pays, so the psychologists tell us, to consider the quality as well as the quantity of sleep. Just the fact that young Peter has fallen asleep does not prove that the sleep he is getting is the most restful kind. His rest may be disturbed without his being awakened. Noise from a passing trolley car may raise his blood pressure, though he may give no indication that he is awakening. Light will act in the same way as noise. The first early evening sleep of children in many homes is too often of very little use as sleep. Sounds of laughter and talking, noise from the radio, dishes clattering in the kitchen, and people walking about noisily, will disturb their sleep. Some care should be taken to keep these noises from reaching the child's bedroom. Not that parents must tiptoe about and whisper all the evening. A better arrangement is to have the child's room placed so that it is far removed from the evening noises, and his door kept closed to provide for undisturbed and wholly restful sleep.

The bed has a great deal to do with sound sleeping. Just why so many parents feel that almost any bed is all right for children to sleep on, is beyond me. The softness and smoothness of the bed means just as much comfort to a small growing body as to an adult. The spring and mattress should be firm and flat, not sagging in the middle. The baby does not need a pillow. If the older child uses one, it should be thin and not too soft. The sheets should be large, so that the edges

will stay tucked in all night; the blankets should be light in weight and wide enough to keep out drafts. For the youngster who kicks off the covers, try a sleeping bag.

Then there are other things that may keep a child awake or cause fitful sleeping. The room may be too hot; the child's nightclothes may be too tight or strings around the waist may bind and be uncomfortable; or the supper which he ate may have been wrong. Suppers have a good deal to do with sleep. Sometimes children are kept awake because they have eaten heavy or indigestible food. Sometimes they are made restless by not having enough nourishing food at night. The traditional bread and milk supper is not enough for the growing child. He should also be given vegetables and sometimes fruit to help supply his need for minerals and vitamins.

To return for a minute to the bedroom temperature--open windows to give a circulation of air and a temperature of from 45 to 55 degrees F. is most comfortable.

There is much more to be said about sleep, but it is time that I gave you your menu for today. This will be a dinner planned especially for the children but quite suitable for the whole family. I will read it: Lamb stew; Rice; Crisp celery; Banana and peanut salad; and Cookies for dessert.

Now shall I give you the recipe for lamb stew? Seven ingredients for lamb stew.

2 pounds of lean raw lamb
2 tablespoons of butter or other fat
1/2 cup of sliced onion
3 cups of diced rutabaga turnip
1 quart of water
Flour
Salt to taste
Once more. (Repeat.)

Breast, shoulder, neck, flank and trimmings are all cuts that may be chosen for lamb stew. Wipe the meat with a damp cloth, cut into small pieces and roll in flour. Melt the butter in a skillet, add the onion, cook until it turns yellow, and add the meat. When the meat and onion have browned delicately, transfer them to a kettle, and add the water, after first pouring it into the skillet so as to get full benefit of the browned fat. Cover the kettle, and simmer for one hour. Then add the turnips and salt and cook 20 minutes longer. If the stew is not thick enough, add 1 tablespoon of flour mixed with 2 tablespoons of cold water, and cook for several minutes longer, stirring constantly. Serve piping hot. In case rutabaga turnips are not available or in case you are not fond of their flavor, the stew can be made with white turnips, with a cup of diced carrots added for color.

Banana and peanut salad is made by peeling and cutting a banana in half the long way, and rolling it first in tart cooked salad dressing and then in chopped peanuts. Serve it on crisp lettuce.

Tomorrow: "Pressing Out That Home-Made Look."

